Dr. E. Fritsch – WS 2019/20 – MS The Neo-Slave Narrative :

Session Nov 6, 2019 - Looking Back and Ahead

“My feet have been so cracked with the frost that the pen with which I am writing can be laid in the gashes” (Douglass)

The metonymic image establishes a connection between...

- two voices: experiencing self (wound) and narrating self (pen)
- two dimensions: the episodic (story made of events) and the configurational (plot/ construction of significant whole) - cf. Olney 1984 echoing Ricoeur
- wound: truth/authentification (testimony) and writing (as sign of subjecthood and agency)
- past and present (connected through scar)

→ In slave narratives emplotment (i.e. fictionalizing) is played down and the documentary value is emphasized (cf. Olney) – what about NEO-slave narratives?
→ Is the pen (writing) a healing agent or keeping the would open?
→ focus on journey from slavehood to manhood rather than freedom?

“Still, in looking back, calmly, at the events of my life, I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others”

“Reader, my story ends with freedom, not in the usual way, with marriage” (Jacobs)

→ the act of taking control of her life signifies simultaneously her ‘fall from grace’ by the standards of femininity of her time, cannot claim ‘true womanhood’ for herself
→ as a writer she needs to include her sexual exploitation and children which a male writer can choose not to reveal
→ ‘my story’ refers to literary conventions: sentimental tradition with ending in marriage, motif of the ‘outraged mother’ (flees because of impending sexual exploitation of her daughter) and of the ‘tragic mulatta’ (seduction plot), uses formula but also alters it

REVIEW: Study Questions *Incidents*

1) differences in form/narration/style

- similar structure, theme and discursive conventions
- linearity of narration
- childhood experiences (+/-)
- frequent reader address (eg. ch. 5)
- strong emphasis on religion in Jacobs' account (both critique hypocrisy of slave-holder's religion)

2) plot & gender

- passivity of waiting in garret rather than heroic fight
- different forms of resistance; destructive vs. generative
- violence/physical strength vs. social capital/network & body/sexuality
- risk (moral red line): appeal: slave women should not be judged by same standards!

3) community

D: mistrust among community, no presence of parents, support network not mentioned

J: family cohesion, grandmother's status and reputation (e.g. auction scene), father tries to free children, dependence on community

4) sex & gender

- dehumanized, defeminized, 'true womanhood' critiqued
  - submissive to husband
  - domestic sphere (household and children), not in public sphere
  - purity (of mind and body)
  - 'angel of the house' stereotype/ideal
  - civilizing influence